

**National Indian Education Association Annual Legislative Summit**  
Washington, D.C.

February 15, 2005



*National Indian Education Association President David Beaulieu greets Rep. Betty McCollum at the NIEA annual legislative conference. Mr. Beaulieu is originally from White Earth Reservation in northwestern Minnesota.*



*Rep. McCollum takes the podium at the National Indian Education Association annual legislative conference and demands President Bush make native education a priority.*

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**Remarks by Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-04)  
National Indian Education Association Conference**

**February 15, 2005**

Welcome to Washington! I would like to extend a special welcome to all of my friends from the great state of Minnesota—and to President David Beaulieu—who originally comes from White Earth reservation in northwestern Minnesota. It is a pleasure to be here with you today.

During your time here, you will walk the halls of Congress advocating for our schools, for Native children, for all children. Thank you for all the work you do! It is important work!

At home in Minnesota, I count on the school board members, administrators, and educators for their expertise. They are among the most dedicated public servants and professionals I know.

I know them as experts—like Elona Street-Stewart vice-chair of the St. Paul School Board, a leader in our city and in the Native American community and newly elected Peggy Flanagan from the Minneapolis school board, who is a strong leader for our state and for the White Earth Band of Ojibwe. All of your commitment and hard work is both appreciated and respected.

My grandmother- who was Irish and French Cree--taught me about the importance of education and hard work.

The work you do improves educational opportunities and resources for all tribes—from Alaska to Hawaii and all across North America. Your work is critical. Thank you for all that you do to strengthen the cultural and social foundation of our educational communities.

I know that some of you have already met with your Representatives and will be on the Hill again today. As you walk the halls of Congress and meet with Senators and Representatives from your home states think of one word – ACCOUNTABILITY! This is your opportunity to hold Members of Congress accountable –Hold us accountable for our votes, our rhetoric, and our actions.

You know who is fighting for our children and fighting to fund our schools, and you know those Members of Congress who are – let me just say – failing to meet *Adequate Yearly Progress* for our schools and our children.

For every Member of Congress you meet --Republicans and Democrats--your questions deserve answers.

- Representative, Senator, how are you going to fully fund No Child Left Behind – not just with promises, but with real money?
- Representative, Senator, what are you doing to do to ensure that American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian students are not left behind—and that they are learning about their cultures?
- And, finally –Representative, Senator, will you guarantee to strengthen our schools and to celebrate successes and not just punish failures?

These are “high stake” questions that demand answers – because what is at stake is the future of our children.

It is critical that we ensure that Native education is a priority—and that it is a part of the national education agenda. But-- there has been a lot of empty rhetoric from the Administration about supporting and meeting the unique cultural academic needs of Native children.

Executive orders, more studies, and more speeches mean little unless they are followed up with real action.

At a time when we're spending \$5 billion dollars per month on the war in Iraq, the President wants to get tough on spending. He wants to get so tough on spending that he wants to cut \$100 million dollars from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. A cut that affects the Bureau of Indian Affairs' own education goals to build more schools for Native children across the country.

Our country's Native American sons and daughters are serving in the armed forces at higher rates than any other ethnic group. But, we are cutting and eliminating education opportunities--for them, for their brothers and sisters, and for their sons and daughters.

U.S. tax dollars are going to build schools in Iraq—yet, here at home we're told that there are no dollars to build schools for our children? This makes no sense.

The President's budget also cuts IMPACT Aid and funding for Title Seven programs. You know Title Seven. And, you know how it promises the highest quality, culturally relevant education for your children. Why are Title Seven funds for the children you serve being cut to pay for the President's underfunded expansion of No Child Left Behind?

Let's be clear. This president wants to expand No Child Left Behind at the expense of the schools and children you represent. Leaving no child behind means leaving no child behind.

Native children have for far too long been left on the sidelines in the traditional education system. Graduation rates for Native students have lagged too far behind the national average- in some areas nearly twice that of their peers. This is unacceptable.

When high school drop out rates are this high, college attendance will be low. When college attendance is low, the presence of Native people in business, in science, in medicine, in education, and in government is diminished.

This is not a failure of the students—but a failure of society. We-- in Washington and in many states across the country-- have failed to address the cultural conflicts faced by Native students across their lifetime—both at home and at school. This is shameful.

In 2001, I was one of forty-one members of the House to vote against No Child Left Behind-- against high stakes testing dictated by Washington; against sanctions and more unfunded mandates; against labeling our children's schools as failing and stigmatizing students and school districts.

Accountability in education is important. That's why I believe in local and tribal control, not federal mismanagement.

Let me ask you: How can the Bush Administration claim they can manage a reform agenda for public education? The same people who are telling you how to run your schools have mismanaged our federal budget into a \$413 billion deficit last year.

The same education officials managing No Child Left Behind are also managing a scandal in which they paid \$241,000 to a corrupt columnist to promote their reform agenda. While this administration paid nearly a quarter million dollars for propaganda, one of my school districts got their Title I funds cut by about the same amount and will have to layoff 38 teachers due to budget shortfalls.

While the U.S. Department of Education sanctions our schools and pays hundreds of thousands dollars – of your money – to spin phony stories – parents from one of my middle school were forced to have bake sales to raise \$34,000 to pay for an additional 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher to reduce class sizes.

The Washington sanctions, scandals and squeezing of our schools must stop.

I am strongly opposed to the federal government dictating, mandating, and not respecting education at the local level. Washington needs to a partner with state, local, and tribal government—respecting your right to culturally appropriate curriculum and standards.

As far as No Child Left Behind is concerned –

let's fix it...

let's fully fund it ...

and if Congress won't fix it and fund it –

then let's repeal it!

We all want our children to succeed. While some focus on not leaving children behind, I want our schools to focus on moving all children ahead.

All children – means kids with special needs and gifted and talented students. Children who want to play sports and students who want to excel in music or art or drama.

And students who want to learn their Native language, to embrace their tradition—they deserve to have that as part of their education. Moving all children ahead means ensuring that academic programs are culturally relevant for all children. And, it means that tests are not culturally biased.

We cannot continue to stigmatize our children through tests that measure failure. And, we cannot continue to ignore and neglect the values of first Americans—whose history is rich in tradition and culture. All children deserve the opportunity to succeed in school— and all schools deserve the resources and support to meet the needs of our children.

For those of you who might be supportive of the reforms— I say the goals are noble, but the implementation has been haphazard and flawed and damaging to education. It is my belief that you – locally elected school board members, teachers, parents, taxpayers – are in the best position to make decisions about how to ensure success for our students.

You don't need members of Congress and bureaucrats in the Department of Education or administrators in the Bureau of Indian Affairs creating new mandates that divert resources and attention away from your children.

You've already been working on reforms at the state and local levels. I didn't come to Congress to destroy the education reforms I worked on in the Minnesota State House – it makes no sense.

And, you certainly don't need the President telling you how to implement education policy amid threats of harsh sanctions and funding cuts. This Administration already has its hands full. It has a mess in Iraq, a fiscal mess with their endless deficit spending, and a health care mess impacting nearly every family and business in America—including our tribal communities.

This White House has a lot of messes to clean up already— they don't need to be messing with your schools. But, no -- they can't just fund their existing unfunded mandates and leave you alone.

Now President Bush wants to expand his mandates and his high stakes testing to high schools. High school testing is not only a misguided policy, but they are paying for it by cutting the Federal TRIO program – a program which provides access to higher education for veterans.

It is a disgrace and I will fight against both the cuts to support for our veterans and this new layer of testing imposed upon our schools. Once upon a time I was a public school student. I am the mom of two public school graduates. I was a substitute teacher in public schools.

I believe in public education and – without a doubt in my mind – the opportunities I have had to serve on my local city council, in the Minnesota Legislature and, now, in Congress, all starts with the foundation my public education provided me.

Friends, you are here to fight for your children—and all of America's children – to once again make a quality education in America a priority for every Member of Congress.

Let me tell you now, you don't need to lobby me – I am standing with you shoulder to shoulder because our children and our schools come first.

I want to thank you for your leadership. And, I want to thank you for your hand in partnership in working with my office and others in Congress. Together we will make America a nation filled with liberty and a respect for all. Thank you!